



November 13, 2001

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the more than 500,000 members and supporters of People For the American Way (PFAW), we urge you to oppose H. Con. Res. 239, which encourages unnecessary and potentially divisive actions by school officials to promote government-sponsored prayer in public schools.

There is no question that students have the right to pray in school. They can do so individually in non-disruptive ways, together with friends before or after school, and in clubs if their school has non-curricular clubs. Courts have repeatedly upheld those rights.

H.Con.Res. 239, however, does not adhere to constitutional standards; it reflects the desire of some individuals and organizations to require public school students to participate in mandatory classroom prayers. This resolution calls on schools to set aside and announce a specific time for prayer and a particular topic. The notion of the federal government or local school officials specifying a topic for prayer is offensive to many Americans across the political spectrum.

Since September 11, Americans all across the country have gathered for memorials, prayer services, and other interfaith gatherings. These freely chosen community gatherings reflect the strengths of American religious liberty and pluralism. And they demonstrate that creating potentially coercive religious ceremonies in public schools is unnecessary as well as unconstitutional.

Even though a concurrent resolution has no legal effect, it sends the wrong message to our nation's parents and school children, and it disrespects our nation's Constitution. We respectfully urge the House to oppose this Resolution.

Sincerely,

Ralph Neas
President

Stephenie Foster
Director of Public Policy